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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: FRAGILE PEACE IN RIFT VALLEY: THE KALENJIN
PERSPECTIVE

REF: NAIROBI 767

¶1. Summary: On a recent trip to Rift Valley province, poloffs accompanied Ambassador Ranneberger to an important peace event at Ndeffo and Egerton University near Nakuru and then met with a range of contacts to discuss the situation on the ground and possible approaches to achieving the desired end state: inter-ethnic tolerance now, and a peaceful election in ¶2012. (See ref A on our efforts to encourage emerging youth leadership.) Contacts in Kericho and Eldoret noted that relations between different ethnic communities are still very tense, and that it would not take much of a spark to reignite conflict. They cited the government's failure to address land reform and to find durable solutions, including payment of compensation, for IDPs as serious underlying issues. Feeling themselves to be vulnerable, the Kalenjin community, especially the youth, remains prepared to defend themselves against any outside attack on their interests. End summary.

TENSIONS STILL HIGH THROUGHOUT MUCH OF PROVINCE

¶2. In Kericho, our contacts described the current situation as "relative peace," but noted that tension and mistrust between communities, particularly the Kalenjin and Kikuyu communities, still exists. A woman who runs an assistance program for HIV positive people on the outskirts of Kericho and has lived in the area for nine years said that "nothing has really changed" since the end of the post-election violence. Much of the neighborhood near the program's office, once a bustling community of largely Kikuyu-owned small businesses, remains empty and has yet to be rebuilt. She said that some people are not yet confident enough in a hospitable environment for returns to invest money in reconstructing their properties. She also said that local Kalenjin land owners have thus far refused to sell her non-governmental organization (NGO) land for expansion at a fair market price, a reluctance she attributes to the NGO's decision to shelter hundreds of Kikuyus on its grounds during the height of the post-election violence.

¶3. In Kericho, violence occurred in the immediate post-election period (late December 2007 to early January 2008) but peaked again on January 31, 2008, when local Kalenjin MP David Too was murdered, allegedly by an ethnic Kisii police officer. Too's murder, as well as the January 29, 2008 murder of fellow ODM MP Mugabe Were in Nairobi, was a flashpoint for renewed inter-ethnic violence throughout the Rift Valley. For example, Sotik and Borabu, which border Nyanza province in the western Rift and represents the border between the Kipsigis and Kisii communities, was "a slaughterhouse," according to local peace activists. (Note:

The Kipsigis are one of a number of Kalenjin sub-clans living in Rift Valley Province; others include the Tugen (former President Moi's community), Nandi, Pokot, Marakwet, Keiyo, Sabaot, Endorois, Njemps and Ogiek.) The Ambassador will be attending a youth forum in Sotik organized by a progressive youth group called Citizens' Assembly (see reftel).

YOUTH ACTIVISTS DENY PREPARING TO FIGHT

¶4. Poloffs also met with three Kalenjin youth activists in Kericho, one of whom represents the local NGO Rift Valley Dialogue Forum (RVDF), which has been involved in peacebuilding activities. They dismissed as false rumors that Kalenjin youths are receiving military training and/or arming themselves in preparation for anticipated future outbreaks of violence. They also said, however, that "people with military experience, who knew how to shoot" happened to be present during a confrontation with police in Ainamoi town in late January 2008, which resulted in the death and dismemberment of an ethnic Somali police officer. They said "we all lost by fighting," adding that, by their count, 46 Kalenjin youths were killed by the police, 146 were shot and injured, and more than 300 were arrested in Ainamoi constituency alone during the post-election violence. (Note: Ainamoi constituency is just north of Kericho town.) Over the past year since the arrests, they claimed, all the detainees were released after charges against them were dropped for lack of evidence. The last person to be released got out of jail in early April 2009.

A MILITIA OF ONE

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¶5. While the youths denied organized training is taking place, they were very clear that they felt it was their duty as Kalenjin men to rise up and protect their community if it was under attack. Pointing to his friend, one said, "He is a militia of one, and will be ready to fight in five minutes if necessary." Older leaders we met in Eldoret concurred: "There is no need to prepare," said one community leader, "Our youth are already prepared." They cited the recent unsuccessful censure motion in Parliament against Rift Valley MP and Minister of Agriculture William Ruto as one such "attack" against the community, and noted that there would certainly have been violence in Kericho if the motion had succeeded. The youth leaders accused the provincial administration hierarchy of ethnic bias in favor of the Kikuyu community, noting that all the MPs and the District Commissioner in Molo district, which was heavily affected by post-election violence, are Kikuyu and were not objective in keeping the peace between the communities. They said that Kikuyus have "taken over the Kenyan economy," leaving no room for other communities to succeed in business. In pursuing their tribal agenda at the expense of others, the activists said, the Kikuyus had "sowed the seeds of hatred toward their community." They claimed that relations are still very strained, and that, if violence recurs, "this country will be brought down by the Kalenjin-Kikuyu conflict."

DISAPPOINTMENT WITH RAILA; RUTO STILL OUR GUY

¶6. The youth activists all expressed disappointment with Prime Minister Raila Odinga, saying that many Kalenjin feel Raila has forgotten who got him into office, and forgotten his pledge to work for federalism (in this case, interpreted as the devolution/decentralization of money and power from the central to regional and local governments). The RVDF representative said that, during the campaign, Raila told the Kalenjins what they wanted to hear, focusing his speeches on anti-Kikuyu sentiment and promising to bring federalism to Kenya. In the community, "federalism" was interpreted as meaning political control over the region where your people dominate numerically. Despite his alleged involvement in corruption scandals and heavy-handed leadership tactics, the youths enthusiastically defended Ruto, saying he was "not

corrupt anymore" and that he was the only leader still fighting for the rights of the Kalenjin people. Ruto and other Rift Valley MPs, they added, are still the most powerful opinion-makers at the local level. They dismissed Minister of Roads Franklin Bett as "unpopular" and not accessible to people at the grassroots level. They were highly skeptical of the potential "KK" (Kikuyu-Kalenjin) political alliance for 2012 being discussed in Nairobi, and thought that Kalenjins would never accept such an arrangement, no matter how pragmatic it might be. However, they noted that Ruto is in the process of reaching out to other communities to try and build a broader coalition, and suggested a Kalenjin-Kisii alliance as a different "KK" that might actually work (this despite the bloody conflict between the communities in Sotik and Borabu after the Too murder). In fact, the Kisii and Kipsigis/Kalenjin communities in this region often intermarry and are closely related.

NAKURU-AREA PEACE EVENTS SEEK SOLUTIONS

17. On April 8, the Ambassador addressed the crowd at a peace event in Ndeffo town seeking to foster reconciliation between the local Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities. He then attended a follow-on Inter-Ethnic Dialogue Forum organized by local NGO Citizens' Assembly. (See ref A.) A number of local NGOs involved in peace building joined representatives of the Provincial Administration, Administration Police, the religious community, and academics for a discussion on how best to promote reconciliation, tolerance, and stability in Rift Valley Province. Participants also discussed the need for "detrribalization" and the development of a national Kenyan identity. Key NGOs participating included the RVDF and Veterans for Peace, an association of ex-military and police officers. The National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) and the Catholic Peace and Justice Commission represented the views of the religious community. The Ambassador addressed the participants and urged them to continue to work together to mobilize peaceful pressure on political leaders and foster a culture of "unity in diversity" from the grassroots level

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up. He also stressed the linkage between economic and political change, and encouraged them to exert peaceful pressure for reforms before the window for change closes as the 2012 elections approach.

ELDORET: NO POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR RECONCILIATION

18. On April 10, poloffs met with a group of community leaders from Eldoret affiliated with the local NGO Emo Society. These older leaders (in their forties through seventies) had a more tempered view of the situation than the youth activists. However, they shared deep concerns about a possible resurgence of conflict in their area. One leader, a retired military officer, said that the wounds from the post-election period had been left to heal without bandages or medicine, and that there was no real support or goodwill from the government for reconciliation. A colleague added that, in fact, many political acts and statements in the past year have acted as scratches to the wound, exacerbating painful divisions among communities. The head of the local office of an international NGO noted that it is very difficult to persuade people to detach from "their" politicians, even when the words and actions of those leaders are counterproductive.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES

19. The Eldoret leaders stressed that shedding human blood is a taboo in the Kalenjin community. One of the Emo Society representatives noted that, while Kalenjins did burn houses during the violence, they usually ensured that the people got out first. Juxtaposed with this taboo, however, is a strong traditional warrior culture. Male circumcision and coming-of-age ceremonies, which usually take place in December, emphasize the importance of having the skills and strength to defend one's family and community from hostile

outsiders. Another leader also noted that, as an introverted people who dislike bargaining, the Kalenjin are at a disadvantage in a competitive world. Most of them are farmers, he said, and are vulnerable to economic exploitation when selling their produce to other communities. This exploitation can create additional resentment towards "outsiders" with whom the Kalenjin must do business.

RETIRED OFFICERS A FACTOR?

¶10. Under former President Moi, Kalenjins were overrepresented in the senior ranks of the military, and to a lesser extent, the police forces. When President Kibaki first came to power in 2003, one of his first actions was to fire a number of high-ranking military officers (many of whom were close to retirement), as well as some police officers from the senior and mid-levels of the security forces. Some of these ex-officers, having returned to Rift Valley, remain extremely bitter about the circumstances under which they left the security forces. The RVDF representative noted that, during the campaign period, some former officers in Kapsabet town and elsewhere were showing their termination letters to people at rallies and saying "look what the Kikuyu have done to us." These officers have professional training, and are alleged to have been recruited by MPs and other local leaders to train the Kalenjin youth in paramilitary skills. The retired military officer we spoke to denied that there were organized militias in the initial phase of the violence (approximately the first two weeks of January 2008), but conceded that there might have been some organization later on for the purpose of looting, burning homes, etc. He also added that there was no organized disarmament by the government after the post-election violence, and that many weapons have been hidden by local communities but remain close at hand in case of emergency.

LAND RIGHTS, DISPLACED PERSONS REMAIN SORE SUBJECTS

¶11. One community leader cited unresolved land rights issues as the biggest source of conflict in Rift Valley, and noted that, due to "historical injustices," the Kalenjin were driven out of their traditional homelands. The Keiyo went east, the Nandi west, and the Marakwet and Pokot north to very marginal rugged terrain. "What hurts," he said, "is the attitude of the (Kikuyu) people occupying the land, who ignore and condescend to us, the original owners." Emo Society representatives also cited unresolved issues

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surrounding the remaining internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a potential flashpoint. Many IDPs who remain in "transit camps" were not paid the government compensation they were promised. Once responsibility for payments was shifted to the local Provincial Administration officials, the process became highly politicized/corrupt and many of the most deserving cases have yet to be addressed. The uncertain future of some IDPs is a destabilizing force in the local community, and the increasingly frustrated and bitter population is vulnerable to political manipulation and incitement against their Kalenjin neighbors.

GETTING TO A PEACEFUL 2012

¶12. Our Eldoret contacts all expressed concern about the 2012 elections. They wondered aloud what can be done now in order to ensure a harmonious political atmosphere and a peaceful transition of power in 2012. One local leader noted that people are already tense, and primed for something to trigger them into renewed conflict. Nevertheless, they had some suggestions for ways to tackle the issues, which incorporate a return and appeal to traditional Kalenjin values:

-- Make peacebuilding efforts intergenerational: restore the role and influence of elders. "Where there are elders, things don't go wrong," said one community leader. Our contacts felt that the revival of integrated intergenerational community

structures, including elderly women and men, could play a powerful role in mediating and structuring the youth's reactions to political events. Elders also have the key role of giving politicians and candidates their blessing, without which leaders cannot be successful. Civic education of elders could assist them in deciding which leaders deserve community support, and could promote and modernize their traditional role in demanding accountability from their leadership. Reinvigorating the culture of eldership could also provide a productive avenue for engaging with former security officers, who could otherwise be recruited by unscrupulous politicians for non-peaceful activities.

-- Strengthen the role of women (including young women) in peacebuilding. Traditionally, women had an important role in peacemaking, often refusing to cook or otherwise carry out their roles until the men in the community agreed to resolve conflicts. Younger women in particular have lost this positive influence because it has not been passed down to them.

-- Promote the culture and understanding of entrepreneurship among the Kalenjin, especially unemployed youth. This will lead to increased confidence and economic empowerment, and reduce the risk of exploitation.

-- Increase the positive involvement of civic councillors, the lowest level of elected representative. Civic council elections are often hotly contested, and councillors are very influential at the local level. They also play an important role in the allocation of local government resources. Citizens' Assembly hosted an event for more than 600 civic councillors from throughout Rift Valley which resulted in the development of an action plan and got very positive feedback from the participants, but they currently lack the resources for follow-on activities with the councillors.

COMMENT

¶13. Many of our Kalenjin interlocutors argued that rumors circulating in Nairobi and Central provinces of militias rearming in Rift Valley are an excuse to justify Kikuyus arming themselves against a (non-existent) Kalenjin threat. Allegations continue to circulate on both sides; it is difficult to determine how much is factual, but the atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust is very real. In Kenya, rumors can be enough to influence behavior on the ground. Whether organized or not, there is no question that the Kalenjin remain prepared to defend their community against perceived threats. The ingredients for renewed conflict in the Rift Valley are already in place, and the behavior of too many politicians from a number of different communities is geared more towards political preparations for dominance in 2012 than towards lasting peace and progress on reforms.

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¶14. Through USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives, we are engaged in a variety of peacebuilding programs on the ground. Civil affairs teams from the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa are completing renovations of several schools destroyed during the post-election violence. In the next month, the Ambassador will preside over ceremonies reopening these schools, as well as the dedication of the reconstructed public market in the town of Burnt Forest, and will use these ceremonies as platforms to bring together community leaders and serve as a foundation for future peace building efforts. In order to support reconciliation and conflict resolution efforts, the Ambassador has visited Rift Valley at least nine times since violence began in early 2008. We will need to keep the political pressure on, and to keep a close eye on events on the ground as we work to consolidate the fragile progress towards lasting peace in Rift Valley. End comment.

